

A

L E T T E R

FROM

C A P T. J. S. S M I T H

TO THE

R E V D M^R H I L L

ON THE

S T A T E

OF THE

N E G R O E S L A V E S.

Rec'd May 1. 1811. 5

Gift of C. Beck, of London

[Now in the Press.]

AN ESSAY on the SLAVERY and
COMMERCE of the HUMAN SPECIES,
(but particularly the African) being the
Substance of a Latin Dissertation, which
was honoured with the first Prize, in the
University of Cambridge, for the Year
1785.

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L E T T E R
F R O M
C A P T. J. S. S M I T H
T O T H E
R E V^D M^R H I L L
O N T H E
S T A T E
O F T H E
NEGROE SLAVES.

To which are added
AN INTRODUCTION,
A N D
REMARKS ON FREE NEGROES, &c.
BY THE EDITOR.

L O N D O N:
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INTRODUCTION.

A Neighbour of mine having sent to a gentleman of his acquaintance my Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the Sugar Colonies, with a desire that he would read it attentively, and give his opinion of it impartially: that request produced the following Letter, which appeared to me to be of so much importance, and to be so decisive in the present controversy, that through my neighbour I begged the writer's permission to make it publick; to which he very obligingly gave his consent. But before I present it to the reader, it is necessary to premise a few introductory remarks.

The answers that have been given to my Essay consist of two parts, the *vindictive* and the *argumentative*. The former exhibits a long list of personal invectives,

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tives, which are the grossest insult on truth, on common justice, and common decency, that can be imagined; and were manifestly intended to draw off the attention of the publick from the main question to subjects of private altercation, and to lessen the weight and credit of the *Essay*, by traducing and vilifying the writer of it. From a regard to the *cause* therefore, no less than to myself, I thought it necessary to clear away all this rubbish of obloquy and falsehood. This I attempted in my *Reply*; and, in the opinion of gentlemen who are by no means partial to me, I have there completely vindicated my character from every charge that my industrious antagonists have, with infinite pains, collected together against me.*

* “ To us Mr. R. appears to have completely vindicated his own character and conduct against every article of impeachment, of any material consequence, that hath been urged in the debate.” *Monthly Review*, January, 1786, p. 28.

In

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In doing this, it was my serious aim, whilst I was defending my own character as a man and an author, to enter no farther into those of my adversaries than they themselves had blended them with their opinions. If, however, in attempting this, it shall be thought by cool impartial judges, who know neither them nor me, that I might have been somewhat less circumstantial, and that the keen feelings of an innocent and much injured man should have been kept more under the government of that Christian moderation, which shews itself most eminently in the severest trials, I bow to the reproof; and shall only request the candid reader to make those allowances, which the uncommon situation I was placed in may fairly claim, and which in cases of self-preservation and self-defence are never denied: for even in the judgment of their advocates, my antagonists were the *aggressors.**

* Monthly Review, January, 1786.

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As to the *argumentative part*, (if it deserves that name) it is so thinly scattered through the answers to my *Essay*, and so very feebly supported, that I might very safely have rested the whole merits of the cause on the *Essay*, without paying the smallest regard to the objections of my opponents. Of those objections, however, such as they are, I have in my *Reply* taken as much notice as they appeared to deserve: and there I meant to have left this controversy. But some friends have lately suggested to me, that there were two points of so much importance, as to claim a fuller consideration than I had there room or leisure to give them. These are 1st, *The general ill treatment, and present wretched condition of the negroe slaves in the British sugar colonies.* 2dly, *The possibility of cultivating the sugar cane by free hired labourers, either black or white.*

Both these positions my antagonists have denied with so much confidence and

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and vehemence, and have given representations of them so diametrically opposite to truth, that persons who have never been in the West Indies, and seen with their own eyes what is daily passing there, may possibly (it is said) be staggered by such bold assertions.

With respect to the first of these, *The general ill treatment, and present wretched condition of the negroe slaves in the British sugar colonies*, did I think it necessary, I might corroborate the abundant proofs given in the *Essay*, by the testimonies of many living witnesses, and by quotations from a multitude of authors of undoubted credit, whose representations of the state of the negroes, each in proportion to his degree of information, are perfectly consonant to mine.* But I really did not conceive it

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* Among many others that might be named, I will only beg leave to refer the reader to these that follow Raynal's *Histoire Politique et Philosophique*, vol. iv.

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to be incumbent on me to adduce such an accumulation of evidence in support of a fact too plain to be controverted. It seemed to me the same thing as going about to prove, by a long train of formal arguments, that *it was light at noon day*. The general ill treatment and misery of the negroes is a fact denied by *none*, but those who are *interested* in denying it.

p. 5, 6, 7. Benezet's Caution to Great Britain, &c. 1767. His Historical Account of Guinea, 1772. Thoughts on Slavery, by Mr. John Wesley; Hawes, 1774. Dean Tucker's Reflections on the Disputes between Great Britain and Ireland, p. viii. 17. Cadell, 1785. Account of the European Settlements in America, vol. ii. p. 120—127. Essays Historical and Moral, by G. Gregory, Essay XVII. and XVIII. Mr. Grenville Sharpe's various Tracts on Negroe Slavery. Sir H. Sloan's Voyage to Barbadoes, &c. 1707. All these gentlemen have described the cruelties exercised on the negroes in stronger colours, and treated the authors of them with more indignation and severity, than are to be found in my Essay. What then will my adversaries say to these respectable writers? Were all these influenced by motives of resentment to traduce the West India Planters? Were such men as these actuated only by *vulgar prejudices*?

A few

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A few men of this description, it is allowed, have contradicted my assertions; or rather the assertions of all who have ever treated of the subject. But contradiction is not confutation. And if the authenticity of the two opposite accounts be fairly weighed against each other, to which of the respective authors is most credit due? To *those*, who thought fit to appear in the character of anonymous pamphleteers, and who, from their connections abroad, are too much parties concerned, too much under the influence of interest and resentment, to be impartial or competent witnesses in the cause: or to *him*, who boldly, and in the first instance, sets his name to his work; who risks his reputation on the truth of his assertions; who forms no claim; complains of no disappointment; who could not (if in his senses) take so absurd a way of gratifying his pique, or recommending himself to favour, as that of publishing to the world a string

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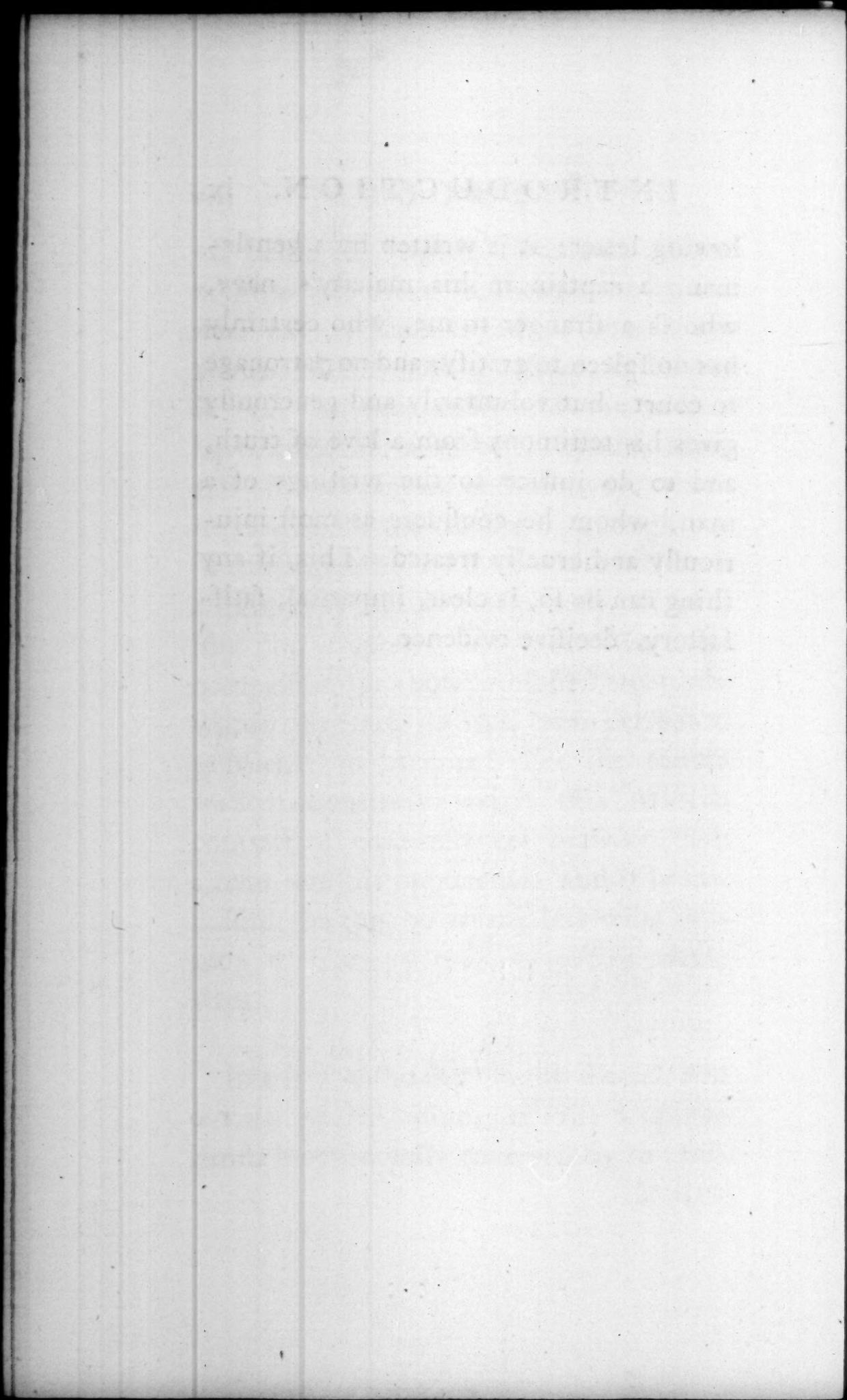
of falsehoods, which thousands might confute the next moment; who, for near twenty years together, was an eye witness of the facts he relates; and who, in fine, had not, and could not possibly have, any other motive for exposing himself to that clamour and obloquy, which he *foresaw* he should incur (though not in the degree he has since endured) from a numerous and powerful body of men, but the sincerest and most heart-felt compassion for those wretched creatures, whose advocate he had been persuaded publickly to become? Let the candid reader attentively weigh this striking contrast of circumstances between such a man and his opponents, and it is impossible he can be at any loss what opinion to form of their respective narratives.

But if the smallest doubt should still remain on his mind, it will, I apprehend, be effectually removed by the following

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lowing letter: it is written by a gentleman, a captain in his majesty's navy, who is a stranger to me, who certainly has no spleen to gratify, and no patronage to court; but voluntarily and generously gives his testimony from a love of truth, and to do justice to the writings of a man, whom he considers as most injuriously and cruelly treated. This, if any thing can be so, is clear, impartial, satisfactory, decisive evidence.

TO



T O

THE REVEREND MR. HILL,
EAST MALLING.

DEAR SIR,

I Should have acknowledged the receipt of your note, and Mr. Ramsay's Effay sooner, but shortly after it came to hand, I was under an engagement to visit Brumpton; and had I not been taken ill there, meant to have visited Malling before my return home. However, I have now the pleasure to inform you I am getting better of my old complaint; and take this earliest opportunity of doing justice to a man, who appears to me to have been grossly ill-treated by anonymous writers.

The

The ill treatment of slaves is too well known, and too universal, to be denied. I do affirm, I have seen the most cruel treatment made use of at several of the West India Islands, particularly at Antigua. While serving on that station, ten years ago, I visited several of the plantations there. In consequence of meeting with an old school-fellow, who managed an estate on that island, I was introduced to many of that description; and too often has my heart ached to see *the cruel punishments, for trifling causes*, inflicted by the manager with such unconcern, as not to break in upon his jocularity. When I have interfered, I have been asked, "Do you not punish on board ships?" My answer was, "Yes, no doubt, but not in this cruel way." — A poor negroe laid stretched flat on his face on the ground, at his peril to move an inch, till the punishment is over; that inflicted with a whip, whose thong, at the thickest part, was the size of a man's thumb, and tapering

pering longer than a coachman's whip. At every stroke a piece was taken out by the particular jerk of the whip, which the manager (sometimes his wife) takes care to direct. This I have often seen for not getting a sufficient quantity of grafts for the manager, (for I well know more goes to his share than his master's)* and many such trifling things.

It is no uncommon thing for a negroe to lie by a week after punishment. *That*, I should conceive, would be of no advantage to the proprietor, however necessary the punishment may be considered. I am truly sorry to say, there are too many of the opinion of Plutarch; and I beg leave to differ very widely from them: for I have had some dealings with negroes, and I cannot say I ever found them so egregiously stupid as is described. I rather found them keen, sensible

* Note by the editor. This must be meant for the manager's own live stock, sheep, goats, &c.

people;

people; and should imagine, were they treated properly, and not driven to those extremes, which are attributed to their vicious dispositions, they would be as tractable as white people. Of this truth I am satisfied, from what I have seen at the island of Grenada. I visited a gentleman there, who lived about six miles from the Carenage; and had the pleasure of observing such a wonderful difference of treatment as astonished me. After dinner, we were enjoying the bottle, and were suddenly surprized by a pleasing melancholy singing. We broke up from table, and found (as I understood was the usual custom) the poor negroes just returned from their labour, singing hymns at the door, and with such decency and decorum, expressive of the most heart-felt love for the manager, as made me exclaim against the treatment I had seen at Antigua. The manager gave me to understand, it was the constant mode in that district; which is called the French quarter. There were

were no cruelties exercised any where near *him*. In other parts of the island, it was the same as in other islands; but he had always a particular satisfaction in returning home to his plantation, finding his negroes do much better, than those who are treated with such inhuman severity. He acknowledged, he had occasion to punish; but did not find it necessary to do it often, or with that cruelty, *so universal in other islands*. We went with him to visit the huts, which he assured us was his constant custom, and asked the negroes in the different huts, if they were satisfied, or wanted any thing. It is impossible to describe my feeling on this occasion: not a single negroe dissatisfied, (I think the number three hundred) nor the driver any complaint to make. If this is to be accomplished in one set of negroes, why not in any other? This plan the gentleman told me he found when he came to the estate. *It originated in the French*. Most of the negroes

negroes spoke French; and one very well informed amongst them kept a school for young negroes. This and many more instances fully convince me, that *slaves in general are not properly treated*. They have fine feelings as well as we, and only want *cultivation*.

I perfectly agree with Mr. Ramsay in every part of his Essay, which I have read very attentively; and was I to observe on every page, could comment more voluminously than I hope is necessary: I shall therefore only observe a few particulars, and conclude for this time, till, on any future occasion, Mr. Ramsay may find occasion to call upon me.

It is too shocking for an Englishman, on his first going to the West Indies, to pass a plantation where the negroes are at work, and hear the violent strokes from the unmerciful whip before described, for perhaps only looking at a stranger passing

passing by, and not going on with the work at the same time. *This I have seen many a time in different islands*, and that in the heat of the day; and many poor wretches have I met on the road with backs too shocking to describe. The last act of humanity or kindness (as it is called) shewn to a negroe after he is worn out by hard work, severe punishment, or sickness from unwholesome food, is to give him his freedom, *too often, when he can scarcely crawl or speak*. Too many well known instances happen of that kind in all the islands, a treatment which surely wants attending to. It is very uncommon in England for a man to turn his worn-out horse loose to seek his living.

It is astonishing that any man will presume to affirm that the negroes are better treated than the peasantry in England. The real fact is, that the first sentiment entertained, by a stranger, of a set or gang of negroes going to work, or at work, is

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neither

neither more nor less than of a drove of cattle going to Smithfield market, or cattle working under unmerciful drivers. It shocks me much to recollect the comparison.

I hope what I have related may prove useful to Mr. Ramsay. I feel for any man, who is contradicted in circumstances too well known to admit of contradiction; and he has my permission to use my name on the occasion, when and where he pleases.

I am,

SIR, &c.

Newington,
28th Jan. 1786.

J. S. SMITH.

After

After the perusal of this letter, the reader will be inclined to think, that the facts in my *Essay* are perfectly conformable to truth; and that I am not the *only* eye-witness, who maintains that *the negroes are cruelly treated*. They, who have occasion to visit the West Indies, need only cast their eyes on the backs of a gang of slaves at work. They will there see but too evident and convincing proofs of the facts asserted by Captain Smith and me. But persons who have never crossed the Atlantick, and cannot have this ocular demonstration, must be content with the best evidence that the nature of the thing admits; that is, with such evidence as is contained in the preceding letter. Captain Smith, we see, affirms, that *the ill treatment of the negroes is too well known, and too universal to be denied*. Neither is it, nor the cruel hardship of grass-picking, confined to St. Christopher; they extend to Antigua, and other islands; even Grenada, where

the good effects of a different management might have taught masters better, continues to suffer under the inhuman influence. He affirms also, in conformity to what I have advanced, and never till now heard denied, that *the French use their slaves with more lenity and gentleness than the English*; and that he himself saw a striking and most pleasing proof of it in Grenada.* He declares in fine, without

* This clear testimony of Captain Smith is confirmed by many other writers of credit. "The negroes in our colonies endure a slavery more complete, and attended with far worse circumstances than what any other people in their condition suffer in any other part of the world, or have suffered in any other period of time." Account of European Settlements in America, vol. 2. p. 120.

"One thing is so notorious, that it cannot be denied, viz. That the English planters, *in general*," (doubtless there are exceptions) "treat their slaves, or suffer them to be treated, with a greater degree of inhumanity, than the planters of any other European nation." Dean Tucker on the Dispute between Great Britain and Ireland, p. 10.

" You

out reserve, that he agrees with me in every part of my *Essay*; and owns that he cannot help feeling for any man, who is contradicted in circumstances too well known to admit of contradiction.

“ You carry the survivors” (those who survive the voyage from Africa) “ into the vilest slavery, never to end but with life: such slavery as is not found among the Turks at Algiers,” (see a quotation in my Reply from Baron Tott) “ no nor among the Heathens in America.” Wesley’s Thoughts on Slavery, p. 24. Mr. Wesley may be considered, from his residence in Georgia, as a competent eye-witness. Indeed, had I seen this little work before mine was published, I should have thought myself obliged to have written in a more warm and decisive manner. His account of the negroe coast of Africa, the happy state of its inhabitants, their advancement in the arts of life, the fatal effects of their intercourse with the Europeans, the destructive violent nature of the slave trade; all agree with every inquiry I have been able to make. To whatever he says of their treatment in the colonies, I add my voluntary testimony, as to a thing within my own observation. His reasoning I think full and conclusive; and am happy to find that, writing at a distance, and without any concert, and only drawing from one common fountain, experience, we agree in almost every conclusion.

The reader now sees with what justice I have been accused of aggravating the miseries of the negroes, and of calumniating and grossly misrepresenting West Indian planters. It appears, that I have advanced nothing but what is confirmed by the most authentick testimony, as well as by almost every author (except my opponents) who has written on the subject. And there are numbers of gentlemen, *now in this kingdom*, well acquainted with the West Indies, who have repeatedly said to me, *in conversation*, what Captain Smith has had the generosity to say in *print*. Indeed, among those who have seen our sugar colonies, *and have no property in them, nor connection with them*, there is but one opinion on this point. But every one does not choose (and I do not much wonder at it) to commit himself in publick with the whole body of West Indian planters.

As

As to myself, I have a just esteem for these gentlemen, and think them a valuable, respectable class of men. These sentiments I have voluntarily and publickly avowed in many parts of my Essay, and my Reply; and in both, and in my Inquiry into the African trade, have repeatedly acknowledged that many of them treat their slaves with humanity and kindness.* I should be shocked at

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* See Essay, p. 76. 87. 91. and 100. See Preface to Inquiry, &c. The reader may there see that *I have not loaded the planters with odious private abuse.* On the contrary, I have produced instances of their good management and humanity, and dwelt on them with apparent satisfaction. Neither is it true that *I have hung up the private characters of living individuals to publick detestation and abhorrence.* It was necessary that I should confirm my assertions by some *particular facts*, otherwise I should have been accused of *vague and general declamation.* But I mentioned no person by name; and those alluded to were either no more, or happily beyond the influence of censure. Nay, so far am I from being judged guilty of having written my Essay with too much warmth, or acrimony, that I am censured by the friends of my opponents for being too cool, for not

the idea of giving one moment's unnecessary pain to them, or any other description of men. But truth is not to be sacrificed to civility, nor duty to complaisance. Nor should the reverence or fear of any man, or any set of men, however numerous and powerful, deter the friends of humanity (they shall most assuredly never deter me, though coupled as they have been with threats of assassination) from pleading the cause of the miserable and oppressed. If from a false point of delicacy and tenderneſs to the planters, the true state of their slaves is never to be investigated, or made known to the world, by those who are perfectly well acquainted with it, it is impossible that their miseries should ever be removed or alleviated, or any improve-

having expressed myself with sufficient ardour and indignation; for not having been animated with the enthusiasm of a Rousseau or a Raynal on topicks so interesting to humanity. See Monthly Review for June and July 1784, and June 1785.

ments

ments be made in their situation. But this is rather too much to be given up in a compliment.

It is, at the same time, but justice to the slave-holders to acknowledge that the wretched condition, and much of the ill treatment of slaves, is not so much a charge against them, as against slavery itself in general. Arbitrary, or undefined power of any kind, is too dangerous an engine to be trusted in the hands of any man whatever. It ever has been, and ever will be abused, and with as much of hurt to the tyrant, as of suffering to the slave. Human nature was not originally intended to support either the one, or the other character. It is the very nature of this pernicious authority, that is chiefly answerable for all the oppression and outrage to humanity that every man of feeling must observe and lament in the sugar colonies.

For

For the credit of the planter, therefore, as well as for the relief of the negroe; and let me add also, because all personal slavery, and still more trading in slaves, though perhaps not forbidden in direct terms, are diametrically opposite to the whole spirit and temper of the Christian religion; I must once more repeat my wish, that some safe, prudent, and practicable method of emancipating the negroe slaves, and employing them afterwards as hired day labourers, might in convenient time be adopted.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood. By emancipation, I do not mean (what my antagonists choose, without the least ground, to ascribe to me) a *sudden, universal, and violent* abolition of slavery throughout the world. This would be as pernicious to the slave, as unjust to the master; nor is any proposal like this to be found in my *Essay*. See p. 127. 286. No scheme of this nature ought

ought to be attempted, (and this I have repeatedly said) but with the utmost caution, prudence, and deliberation, slowly, gradually, and almost imperceptibly; first, humanizing and civilizing the negroes, advancing them in society, instructing them in Christianity, giving them one privilege after another, as they are able to bear them; and thus preparing them by degrees for the possession, and *the right enjoyment* of freedom; of which in their present state of ignorance, and want of right principles of action, they would probably make a very improper use. This is evidently a progressive and a beneficial plan. The accomplishment of it is so remote, that the present slave-holders cannot possibly be affected, and certain I am their successors will not be injured by it.

But all this my adversaries strenuously contend, is *absolutely impracticable*. It is a bold visionary romantick chimerical project.

project. They affirm, that no free negro ever *did*, or ever *will*, voluntarily become a day labourer, nor can by any temptation be induced to work as such for hire. —And this is the *second* point, which, I am told, deserves some farther notice.

It is alledged, then, in the first place, that the Marons, in Jamaica, and the Charibs, in St. Vincents, are, and have been, for a series of years, to every purpose, *free negroes*, yet that none of these were ever seen working for hire, or ever shewed the least disposition to do so.

Supposing this to be the fact, it ought to be considered, though these negroes inhabit parts of civilized countries, yet they are not comprehended in the laws; police is not extended to them. They are in a state of constant warfare with the civilized inhabitants; they despise their customs, and abhor their manners. They connect the idea of slavery with imitation;

tion; they must therefore continue savages, while they continue distinct. They are just what the Scotch Highlanders and the Welch were before incorporation took place, and law had extended her influence over them. They are what the Indian tribes in America, and what many of the original Irish are at this day. Now it is well known, that none of these, nor any other savages, whether *black* or *white*, (for the colour makes no difference) ever did, or ever will submit to hard labour, as long as they can maintain themselves by plunder, hunting, or any other way.

But, let these people be completely civilized; let them be trained from their earliest years in the employments of the fields, in habits of labour; let them once taste of the sweets of industry, as we propose for our slaves, and they will become as diligent, and as well disposed to work for hire as Europeans.

Indolence is the characteristick of a savage. It is civilization alone, and early habit, that can give a turn to industry. No argument, therefore, can be drawn from men in a state of barbarity, bred up from their infancy in idleness, and considering that freedom, which they value above all things, as connected with idleness, to men in an improved state of society, accustomed from their youth to hard labour, which is the supposition whereon my reasoning is founded.

But setting this aside, how could the free negroes of St. Vincent's or Jamaica find employment in the field, were they even desirous of it? Every planter depends on his own, or the hired slaves of others for the culture of his grounds. If a free negroe be employed, he must work among slaves; but this a freeman would consider as ignominious and disgraceful; nor will he ever submit to such degradation, while he can maintain himself

self by hunting, shooting, or fishing. But this is not peculiar to *negroes*; white men, in the same circumstances, entertain exactly the same sentiments, and have always acted precisely in the same manner. Before savages can be civilized, they must be set down in a particular spot, and be taught to draw their maintenance from the ground.

It is said farther, that in every West India island, there are slaves, who have been made free; and of these, not one is ever known to have hired himself out to work in the fields. They all betake themselves to lighter employments; becoming hucksters, pedlars, fishermen, or domestick servants. All this is true; but for the reason already assigned is nothing to the purpose; for, if they work in the field they must work with slaves; but this is a degradation to which they cannot stoop. But if the slaves in general were gradually raised to freedom, and if the

custom

custom were continued that they should work in the field for hire, the case would be totally altered. The numbers then freed could not find employment, but in the field labour, to which they had been accustomed from their infancy. No doubt police ought to interpose, and direct their labour to the common good; and liberal wages would make them cheerfully apply to it.

At present, they, who have freedom given them, are not in sufficient numbers to be under a *necessity* of applying to field work, if it were (which it is not) *open* to them, or *creditable* for them. Nor are the wages now given to hired blacks sufficient to tempt freemen from easier occupations. Within these very few years, negroes wrought by the gang for 8d. per day; the common rate was 10d. and in time of the late war did not rise above 13d. $\frac{1}{2}$ sterling per day. Now, if there were no discredit in working with

with slaves, a freeman can lay out his time to better advantage than in earning such wages. What wonder is it then, that a negroe should, under these circumstances, prefer an easy employment, with good profit, to hard labour with less. Would not a white man do the same? Thus far, there is no proof that aversion to labour is peculiar to *negroes*.

But we have to consider of what kind are the slaves to whom freedom is generally given in our islands. They are either concubines, or other favourite domesticks, or else old, infirm, worn-out field negroes, struck off the list by a sham manumission to save their taxes. I do not recollect a *single instance* of a field negroe having been made free, till he was *past labour*; and this is confirmed above by Capt. Smith. "The last act of kindness," says he, " shewn to a negroe, after he " is worn out by hard work, severe " punishment, and sickness from un-

“ wholesome food, is to give him his
“ freedom, when he can scarce crawl or
“ speak.” How is it possible then for
such wretches as these to hire themselves
out as day labourers? or who would
employ them?

Another fact appealed to is, that
though there are several thousands of free
negroes in England, yet none of them
are ever found employed in any labori-
ous work, either in the fields or streets.
The fact is not *universally* true; for I have
known *some* negroes in England, and
have heard of others, who have wrought
as day labourers. But suppose the case
to be *in general*, as stated. The reason is
plain. Not one in an hundred of those
to be found in England *have ever worked*
in the field, or been brought up from
childhood to hard labour. They have been
bred up either as tradesmen, mechanicks,
fishermen, or domesticks, and have ei-
ther got privately away, or have come
over

over with their masters, and deserted their service in England. These, having never been accustomed to field labour in their youth, cannot bring themselves to it when advanced in years. And those few who may be able and willing to work, being acquainted with no other place but London, know not how or where to apply for country work; nor would the farmers employ them if they did apply, having labourers in abundance in their own villages, and being afraid of bringing in strangers, lest they become burdensome. My own opinion is, that most of those, who are to be found in England, are above field labour. But, unless there be a charm in the expression *field labour*, they are not therefore incapable of being made useful. They particularly take easily to a sea life, and become carpenters and caulkers, and very excellent seamen. I knew myself one, who had raised himself to be captain of the forecastle, in a well-manned frigate.

In short, there is not a single case in point, a single fact that comes home to the question, produced by the advocates for negroe slavery. No conclusion can be drawn against the possibility of cultivating the sugar cane by *free negroes*, from the general idleness either of the savage Charibs in St. Vincents, or of the Marons in Jamaica, or of the worn-out field slaves, or of the domesticks made free in the West Indies, or of the run-away black servants in England. None of these are in the situation of those for whom I propose freedom. None of them are negroes who have been bred up from childhood in field work, in habits of industry and labour, who are civilized, are made good men and good Christians, are allowed some of the privileges of our common nature, enjoy some of the comforts of social life, and are thus prepared gradually for freedom, are then actually made free in the vigour of their health and strength, while their affections are lively,

lively, and all the tender ties of a family operate strongly on them: who are then retained by previous stipulations and judicious regulations as day labourers, at a fair and equitable rate, and have their work allotted them with other freemen, not with slaves. These are the persons I mean, who, I say, will do the work of a planter better and cheaper than slaves. *With such labourers as these, and in sufficient numbers, an experiment has never yet been fairly and fully made; and till it has, my opponents have no right to say, that negroes discreetly manumitted will not, and cannot, be made to work as day labourers.*

There is, indeed, a shadow of freedom, which, though attended with many ill consequences in particular instances, may yet serve to shew what negroes might do in a state of real freedom. Masters and mistresses, not connected with plantations, allow their slaves to find work for

themselves, paying them a certain stipulated sum. Sometimes it must be owned, that the methods used to earn this sum, are scandalous and base. But it is well known, that *sober industrious slaves* will carefully pay their masters this hire, and lay by perhaps as much more for themselves. In all the islands, but particularly in Barbadoes, there are numbers of white families almost entirely supported by this voluntary labour of one, two, or a few slaves hiring themselves out to work for other people. Will any man venture to assert, that such slaves would not *equally* exert themselves were they made free, for their own or their families interests? Will stripes and chains operate more powerfully than hunger, distinction, and that universal instinct, which we know every other creature exerts for its offspring, all taken together? It is a mockery to reason but to pretend to doubt of this.

But

But to put this matter beyond all doubt, I have it in my power to answer the challenge, and produce a positive fact in proof of my assertion, that free negroes may be employed advantageously as voluntary labourers.

In Pennsylvania, the Quakers have freed their slaves. Those who have been manumitted have taken mostly to field labour. They make good labourers, and live reputably and well. Many of them are much attached to their old masters. Some, who had given all their slaves their liberty, and now employ them at day wages, find their farms answer better and more profitably than before. They are employed in the culture of corn, maize, tobacco, and every species of husbandry.

This is so full and positive an answer to the objection, that if all our reasoning on the subject were gainsayed, it must

continue to silence the advocates for slavery, till it be as fully and positively proved false.

So much for the possibility of cultivating sugar plantations with *free negroes*; I add, that if necessary, which now it is not, it may also be done by *white labourers*.

It is a little singular, and sounds something like a contradiction, that the very same gentlemen who affirm that *free negroes* are not fit for working in the field as hired labourers, maintain also, that *negroes* are *the only people capable of field work* in a West Indian climate; and that *white men* are not equal to the labour of a sugar plantation. But this position is as false and groundless as the other. The *negroe* is not endued with any powers for enduring heat, but what *habit* would in time impart to a *Tartar* or *Lapland tribe*, if settled between the tropicks. In fact, ever since the first settlement

tlement of the sugar colonies, *white people* have been accustomed there to *much harder labour* than the common plantation work. Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands must indeed have been originally *cleared from wood* by the labour of *white men*; and the clearing of land from wood is *beyond all comparison harder* than the ordinary field work in a sugar plantation. When the islands of Nevis and St. Kitt's, about 130 years ago, contained a militia of upwards of 15000 men, and of course must, at a very low calculation, have contained upwards of 50000 inhabitants; could they and their families have subsisted by the labour of slaves alone? The fact is, the slave trade was then in its infancy, and the few negroes that were introduced were rather fellow labourers than slaves.

In England, workmen in glass houses, and smiths in forging ship anchors, work in a much more violent and ener-
vating

vating heat, than that of the sun between the tropicks. In the West Indies, the trades of blacksmith, house carpenter, mason, and shipwright, the loading and unloading of sugar ships, are all performed by white men, who, when they are sober and careful of themselves, do not materially suffer by it. Yet all these employments are more laborious there than tilling of the ground. Plantation work is not, indeed, in itself hard. It is the use of *strength* instead of *contrivance*; it is the want of food, clothes, rest, and sleep, that wears slaves out. It is the drawling out their task from early dawn to dusky night; it is the wandering three or four miles under the meridian sun to pick up their bundles of grafts, that constitute their hardships.

If they were properly clothed and fed; if the hours of labour were judiciously allotted; if a little more method were employed in assigning their tasks, much more

more work might be done than at present, without impairing their strength, or hurting their health. And, under these regulations, the same work might be done by *white men*, if they would but resolve to be sober, and abstain from the excessive use of rum, to which they generally fall victims. In fact, if there be any difference between black and white labourers, it is to be wholly ascribed to the superior degree of sobriety and regularity to be found among the blacks.*

* For this, also, we have a competent eye-witness in Mr. Wesley, he says, p. 20, of his *Thoughts on Slavery*, “ White men, even Englishmen, are well able to labour “ in hot climates, provided they are temperate both in “ meat and drink, and that they inure themselves to it “ by degrees. I speak no more than I know by ex- “ perience. I and my family, eight in number, em- “ ployed all our spare time, while in Georgia,” (a climate hotter, and ten times more unfavourable to the human constitution than the West Indian islands) “ in “ felling of trees, and clearing of ground; as hard “ labour as any negroe need be employed in. The “ German family, likewise, forty in number, were em- “ ployed in all manner of labour. And this was so far “ from impairing our health, that we all continued per- “ fectly well, while the idle ones, round about us, “ were swept away as with a pestilence.”

The

The negroes, now, in our colonies, if properly treated, and their work judiciously allotted, are sufficient for the culture of all our present colonies; but if they were not so, there is no natural inability to make white labourers inadequate to the task. And, on the whole, we are warranted for concluding, that the work might be done to advantage by *free labourers*, whether black or white. Nay, I have the celebrated Dean of Gloucester on my side, affirming that free-men might cultivate them to much more advantage, and of consequence that sugars might be much cheaper than they are at present. Of this he remarks one striking proof: "In the British islands," says he, "the common price of sugars, in time of peace, is generally found to be about 25s. sterling per cwt. In the East Indies, as I am credibly informed, it is no more than 2s. 6d. And what is the reason of this? Why, in the West Indies the sugar is raised and manufactured by *slaves*; in the East Indies by "free-

“*freemen only.*” See Dispute between Great Britain and Ireland, p. 13. See also my Essay, p. 116.

But after all that has been said on this point, I wish to have it *clearly and distinctly understood*, that though all my reasonings respecting the *gradual emancipation* of the negroes, and the practicability of employing them or others as free labourers, should prove less solid than many persons of the soundest judgment think them to be; yet this would not in the least affect the *great and principal object* of my Essay. Though I sincerely hope, that *some* plan will be devised for the future gradual abolition of slavery; and though I am convinced that this may, without any prejudice to the planter, or injury to commerce, be brought about by some such progressive method as is pointed out in the Essay; yet this was not the first, or immediate object of that book. What I had chiefly in view there, was to prove and establish these two points.

1st. That the negroe slaves in the British West India islands are in general (though with several exceptions) ill clothed, ill fed, too hardly worked, and too severely punished.

2d. That matters of this importance to good government and humanity, ought no longer to be left to the discretion of masters and the caprice of overseers; but should be regulated by fixed and written laws: that the slaves should be instructed thoroughly in the principles, and trained up in the practice, of morality and religion; should be considered as men, and treated as rational beings, intitled to the benefits of social life, and indulged with more of its comforts than they now possess. See Essay, p. 281, &c.

The first of these propositions, I have proved by the best evidence of which the subject is capable; by the production of facts, to which I myself was a witness for

for near twenty years, and by the additional testimony of a gentleman of unquestionable veracity, as given in the preceding letter: to which may be added, that of all the writers above mentioned, (several of them men of distinguished characters) who all, without any previous communication, unanimously agree in the same opinion; if it were necessary, I might add my antagonist's concessions as noted in my Reply.

The consequence must be, that the necessity of carrying into execution the improvements specified in the second proposition is evident and incontrovertible. My adversaries themselves allow this necessity. They express in very strong terms their approbation of that section of the Essay, which recommends such improvements; and, in doing this, they approve what I consider as *the most essential and important part of the whole book*; which will gradually, and in time, perfect my every wish on the subject.

If

If, therefore, these gentlemen are sincere (and why should we doubt them) in the wish they express, (Cursory Remark, p. 4.) *that the blessings of freedom may in due time be extended over the face of the whole globe*, and of course to the negroe slaves, among others; if they will be so far consistent, as to give a fair hearing, and a fair trial, to the proposals made by others for accomplishing this, their own benevolent wish, for what I dare to add will be their own profit; or will themselves propose something better; and in the mean time will, to the utmost of their power, encourage and promote the extension of those privileges and benefits to the negroe slaves, which are suggested by me, and approved by them, we shall hereafter have no difference, because it will appear that we mean precisely the same thing.

JAMES RAMSAY.

Telton,
Feb. 20, 1786.

P O S T S C R I P T.

SINCE the above went to the press, a fourth anonymous Apology for Slavery has made its appearance. It contains no semblance of argument that is new, or that has not been already answered. Its charges against me of fanaticism, cruelty, drunkenness, motives of questionable shape, of having lately published a Rhapsody, (which is not yet in print) while the accuser conceals his name, and sets out with acknowledging, "he knows neither my person nor character," I shall leave to the Reader's candour, as unworthy of any particular contradiction.

I rather wish to call the publick attention to the Present State of our African Slave Trade. The French are so intent on the improvement of Hispaniola, and their planters, by chiefly residing

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on their plantations, are so well able to give high prices for slaves, that they have drawn a great proportion of the slave trade to that colony; the average price of slaves being there from 45l. to 47l. sterling per head, while in other colonies they cannot afford to give above 35l.

Yet, notwithstanding these high prices, such at present are the difficulties of procuring slaves on the coast of Africa, that the trade is not near so profitable as formerly; ships being fitted out for the slave trade rather to oblige particular captains than with a view to any considerable gain. Here then are we engaged in a scandalous and not very advantageous commerce, to improve the French sugar colonies. For though it be very possible that the French planter may, by giving such high prices, lose in extending his plantation, yet, every new acre of land put in sugar canes is an addition

addition to the publick stock; it employs additional sailors, and additional shipping, and thus extends the nursery of a rival navy. What motives of prudence, added to those of humanity, for a thorough parliamentary investigation of this horrid trade!

F I N I S.

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